

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 3031

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BM

SUBJ: MARTIAL LAW ENDS IN RANGOON, PRISONERS RELEASED

1. THE GUB ON 31 AUGUST PROCLAIMED THE "CESSATION OF STATE OF EMERGENCY IN RANGOON DIVISION AND WITHDRAWAL OF MILITARY ADMINISTRATION POWERS." THE PROCLAMATION, PROMINENTLY PRINTED IN THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PRESS, STATED THAT MARTIAL LAW HAD BEEN DECLEARED ON 11 DECEMBER 1974 "FOR THE PURPOSE OF SAFEGUARDING THE STATE AND PUBLIC SECURITY BECAUSE OF DISTURBANCES THAT OCCURRED IN RANGOON DIVISION DURING DECEMBER 1974" (I.E., THE U THANT RIOTS), BUT NOW "THE SITUATION IN RANGOON HAS RETURNED TO NORMAL."

2. THE PROCLAMATION OF THE END OF MARTIAL LAW FOLLOWED THE ANNOUNCEMENT ON 26 AUGUST THAT 4914 PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN SENTENCED TO JAIL IN RANGOON DIVISION BY SUMMARY MILITARY TRIBUNALS SINCE 11 DECEMBER 1974 WOULD HAVE THEIR TERMS QUASHED OR REDUCED. THIS WAS DONE, ACCORDING TO THE PRESS REPORT, "TO ENSURE THAT THE SENTENCES HANDED DOWN WERE FAIR AND EQUITABLE AND ALSO BECAUSE (IT IS NECESSARY) TO BE LENIENT ON SOCIAL GROUNDS." (MANY MARTIAL LAW SENTENCES WERE VERY SEVERE; AND THE "SOCIAL GROUNDS" FOR LENIENCY PROBABLY INCLUDE THE EXTREME OVERCROWDING OF JAIL FACILITIES.) THE PRISONERS

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AFFECTED CONSIST OF 535 CONVICTED OF " SECURITY OFFENSES";

1444 CONVICTED OF "ECONOMIC OFFENSES"; 17 CONVICTED OF "SOCIAL CRIMES"; AND 2918 CONVICTED OF "CRIMINAL OFFENSES." AS A RESULT OF THE QUASHING OF CONVICTIONS AND SENTENCE REDUCTIONS, 1583 PRISONERS ARE TO BE RELEASED IMMEDIATELY.

3. COMMENT: THE PRINCIPAL PRACTICAL EFFECT OF THE END OF MARTIAL LAW IN RANGOON IS THE RETURN OF JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS TO THE NORMAL CIVILIAN SYSTEM. WE ARE NOT SURE WHY THE GUB CHOSE THIS PARTICULAR TIME TO END MARTIAL LAW AND RELEASE PRISONERS, BUT THESE MOVES COULD REFLECT AN ATTEMPT TO EASE POLITICAL TENSION, WHICH HAS BEEN RATHER HIGH IN RANGOON, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE ABORTED COUP PLOT. ALSO, AFTER A YEAR AND A HALF OF THE "STATE OF EMERGENCY," IT WAS PROBABLY FELT APPROPRIATE TO RETURN RANGOON DIVISION TO THE SAME JUDICIAL STATUS AS THAT OF THE COUNTRY'S OTHER DIVISIONS.
OSBORN

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